



# The 3, 4 and 5-Year-Old: Physical Changes

The preschool years are exciting times for children. Each day preschoolers discover more and more about themselves and their world. During these years children gain new skills, abilities and knowledge. This fact sheet will help you understand preschool children. It's important to remember that the information in this factsheet is only a guide. Children grow and develop at their own rates.



## Height and weight

The growth rate during the preschool years is slower and steadier than it was during the first three years of a child's life. Fifty percent of children in each category are above this height or weight level; and 50 percent are below it.

Height (inches)		
Age	Girl	Boy
3	37 ¼	38
3 ½	39 ¼	39 ¼
4	40 ½	40 ¼
4 ½	42	42
5	43	43 ¼
5 ½	44 ½	45
6	46	46

  

Weight (pounds)		
Age	Girl	Boy
3	31 ¼	32 ¼
3 ½	34	34 ¼
4	36 ¼	36 ½
4 ½	38 ½	38 ½
5	41	41 ½

These are averages for height and weight. A child's height and weight are influenced by many factors. These include diet, exercise, illness, emotions and the height and physical build of the child's parents.

Growth occurs mostly in preschooler's legs and the trunks of their bodies. Their stomachs flatten. Therefore, their physical proportions or shapes begin to look like those of a school age child, instead of those of a baby.

## Internal changes

Other physical changes happen during the preschool years. Breathing becomes slower and deeper. The heart beats more slowly and steadily than it did during infancy. In boys, especially, blood pressure increases.

A preschool child's bladder is larger than it was in infancy. Children can go for longer periods without going to the bathroom. However, by the age of six, one out of two boys

still wets the bed at night. Wetting happens more often when children are sleeping away from home. Also, it may happen when there are family or personal problems in children's lives.

## **Motor development**

By the age of four, a child usually shows a preference for using either her right or left hand. About 90 percent of all children are right-handed. If a child is left-handed, don't make her use her right hand. She will have fewer emotional upsets if she's allowed to use the hand she prefers. Also, she will draw, cut, write and do other fine motor activities better.

Most parents and caregivers are especially aware of their children's motor development. They want to see their children develop motor skills typical of their ages. But all children are different. Many factors influence motor development. These include physical maturity, enjoyment of physical activity, opportunities or practice motor skills and overall health. Listed below are some skills which may develop during the preschool years.

### **Large motor skills typical of preschool children:**

#### **3 years**

- Runs smoothly, turns sharp corners and stops suddenly
- Climbs stairs by alternating feet
- Balances on one foot for a few seconds
- Throws balls overhand, frequently catches a ball with arms fully extended
- Jumps off one step
- Jumps in place
- Pedals tricycle
- Pumps a swing

#### **4 years**

- Walks heel-to-toe
- Skips clumsily
- Runs easily
- Walks downstairs by alternating feet
- Hops on one foot
- Balances on one foot for five or more seconds
- Catches ball thrown at five feet
- Climbs a small jungle gym

#### **5 years**

- Walks backward with heel-toe pattern
- Hops
- Balances on alternate feet with eyes closed
- Uses hands more than arms to catch a ball
- Jumps down three or four steps
- Jumps rope
- May roller skate

### **Fine motor skills typical of preschool children:**

#### **3 years**

- Undresses self, helps to dress self
- Undoes buttons on side or front of clothing
- Washes hands
- Feeds self
- Recognizes and draws a circle, draws a crude cross

- Scribbles
- Pours liquid from pitcher with some spills
- Begins to use scissors
- Strings large beads
- Does many puzzles by trial and error
- Builds tower of nine to ten blocks

#### 4 years

- Dresses and undresses self; but can't tie bows, close zippers, or put on boots
- Buttons clothes, laces shoes but can't tie bows
- Brushes teeth alone
- Recognizes and draws a crude square
- Traces a cross and a diamond
- Uses scissors to cut a line
- Looks at puzzle before placing pieces
- Builds block structures which extend both vertically and horizontally

#### 5 years

- Ties shoe laces
- Copies a triangle
- Prints a few letters or numbers crudely
- Draws a person with six parts
- May print first name
- Uses hammer to hit a nail
- Uses scissors and some tools such as a screwdriver
- Folds paper diagonally
- Does simple puzzles quickly and smoothly
- Builds structures out of large boxes

#### Sources:

Papalia, D.E. & Wendkos Olds, S. (1996). *A Child's World: Infancy Through Adolescence*. McGraw Hill Inc.  
 Steinberg, L. & Meyer, R. (1995). *Childhood*. McGraw Hill Inc.

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